

Chapter 3:

The American Appearance

As the United States envisioned its future, the complicated mosaic of European and Latin American claims and Native American presence west of the Mississippi River attracted the attention of the new and powerful republic to the north and east of the Guadalupe Mountains and the trans-Pecos region. This new nation, possessors by purchase of everything north of the Adams-Onís treaty line along the Red, Sabine, and Arkansas rivers, had to find a way to hold this vast land it had barely begun to explore. Mexican independence in 1821 quashed Spanish claims, and the French had become a mere memory in the aftermath of the 1803 sale of Louisiana. Among European powers, only the British remained to contest American expansionist desires. Mexico, the successor to New Spain, lacked the resources to hold its northern possessions against the encroachment of American citizens acting in loose concert with their government's desires. Slowly, Tejanos and Nuevo Mexicanos — the Spanish-speaking peoples of Texas and New Mexico — were seduced by first the trade goods and then the ideas of this republic that promised liberty and prosperity resulting from individual efforts. After the Texas Revolution in 1835 and the Republic of Texas' annexation by the United States ten years later, Americans enjoyed much more than an intellectual and commercial toehold in the former New Spain. Expansionist ideology under the concept of Manifest Destiny — the widely held idea by Euro-Americans that the North American continent belonged to the United States and should be conquered as soon as possible — insisted on more. In a war begun in 1846 on a pretext and to which a broad range of luminaries objected, including Illinois state legislator Abraham Lincoln and the writer Henry David Thoreau, the United States seized an enormous portion of northern Mexico. The Mexican War and its aftermath filled out the physical limits of the southern boundaries of the United States. America then began efforts to eliminate the last European power, the British, still entrenched in the Pacific Northwest, out of its self-defined area of interest. The young nation invented a mission for itself and intended to carry it out, no matter what other countries believed or tried to do to stop this young expansionist upstart.¹

¹ Robert W. Johansen, *From the Halls of Montezuma*, ; Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, 271-301, insightfully describes this process in the Spanish departure from Florida and the American Southeast; William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 231-64, describes the causes and consequences of the Mexican War.

After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, when Mexico formally ceded its holdings north of El Paso and the Rio Grande to the United States, American officials contemplated the lands the war bestowed upon them. The so-called bloodless conquest of New Mexico in 1846 — when Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny boldly promised the people of Santa Fe that he would keep at bay the Navajos, who long preyed on the weak colony and province — had given way to violence in the Taos Revolt of 1847. There Gov. Charles Bent and a number of Anglos died at the hands of a combined Pueblo Indian and Hispano force. Despite the commerce on the Santa Fe Trail that linked St. Louis and Santa Fe with the Mexican city of Chihuahua and promoted international trade, American national interests in New Mexico were a great deal more ideological than economic. While California offered the prospect of wealth even before the 1848 gold strike at Sutter's Mill, New Mexico was as peripheral to the American republic as it was to New Spain or Mexico. Kearny saw himself as a liberator, and the Hispano elite, the *ricos*, concurred. For more than a generation, the Santa Fe Trail trade enriched them and they were loath to give up wealth and their connections with the north to support the idea of Mexican nationalism and the weak governments that Mexico spawned.² Although the Americans had no obvious economic need for New Mexico beyond existing trade in 1848, its acquisition fit the American pattern begun with the Louisiana Purchase: acquire lands and then discern what purpose they might have.

New Mexico was a periphery in the United States; the Guadalupe Mountains and the trans-Pecos area were the peripheries of a periphery, a place that few Americans considered when they forced Mexico to sign over much of its northern lands. This was no surprise; neither Mexico nor the Republic of Texas had any use for this remote region. This desert never figured in Mexican or Texican plans, except when Mescaleros or other peoples in the vicinity threatened order in the region's core areas. Nor did Americans see any obvious use for the region except to pass through it. El Capitan, the visible peak of Guadalupe Mountains, served as a place people could use to find their geographic bearings, but in any practical sense the region lacked importance. Insufficient water, barely arable soil even in the river valleys, tremendous heat and aridity, and the lack of known minerals — excepting salt, which enjoyed only little market value — left the region neglected in the most classical of colonial forms.

Significant American interest in the region began in the middle of the nineteenth century. After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a parade of U.S. Army expeditions, railroad surveys, and boundary surveys began. These efforts were of a piece with the earlier surveys of John C. Frémont and U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers, which beginning in the 1830s searched for railroad routes through the West, including areas claimed but not settled by Mexico. Official American representatives, whose task it was to assess information, define boundaries, and otherwise locate the areas in question within the world view of the expanding United States, comprised a vanguard. As did Lewis and Clark and every other American explorer who preceded them, these Southwest explorers fully expected to

² Andrés Réseñdez, "Caught Between Profit and Ritual: (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1997); Douglas C. Comer, *Ritual Ground: Bent's Old Fort, World Formation, and the Annexation of the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

open the way for settlement of the new territories acquired by the United States.

The U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers led the way in the process. From its beginnings in 1838, this division enjoyed a mission all its own, the obligation to record accurately as many of the features of the American West, within and outside the boundaries of the United States at that moment, as its officers could and to provide the documentation to support settlement and even military endeavors. This included well-traveled roads and trails, mountain peaks, river-basin valleys, and anything else that the contingent of no more than thirty-six men at any one time observed. Compared with the rest of the U.S. Army and even its Corps of Engineers, this mission was unique. Of all the branches of the service, the Topographical Engineers shared a great deal more with espionage units than did other military forces. As if they were spies, the Topographical Engineers specialized in reconnaissance and the knowledge that stemmed from it.³ Scientist and explorer both, these engineers epitomized the spirit of the intellectual transformation from Romanticism to Empiricism that joined with western expansion and eventually crested late in the nineteenth century and in the first five decades of the twentieth century. Most experienced awe at the sublime and romantic features they recorded just as they began to measure and quantify them, to know them in the terms of emerging empirical science.

Throughout the late 1840s and 1850s, Americans sought to determine what they had won from Mexico in the recent war, a process made imperative by the California Gold Rush. Their military explorers defined the land around them in largely utilitarian terms. Potential routes for a railroad to the California coast stood first among their objectives, followed by the need for overland routes for migrants to California and the Pacific Coast. A number of the important possible paths passed through the trans-Pecos region. These surveyors collected a corpus of knowledge that informed future American decisions in an area that only an ideology such as Manifest Destiny could make valuable to nineteenth-century people. In an age when most people depended on wood for their shelters and heat and even regarded trees as an indicator of the fertility of land, this region was terribly lacking.⁴ The problems that beset the Spanish and the Mexicans — lack of water, limited arable lands, and the inability to transform these fundamental qualities — also hampered the Americans. They too regarded the area as only a place through which to pass.

They acquired that knowledge from experience, from a range of travelers and surveys, from officials and individuals, and from the reports of military officers who traversed the region. Most familiar with the new acquisitions from Mexico knew the Guadalupe Mountains and the trans-Pecos were a semiarid to arid plain, cut by occasional rivers and equally few streams; these observers lacked any specific knowledge of mineral resources or other potential bounty. They knew that the Spanish and Mexicans had never successfully explored for anything of economic consequence. Transportation routes

³ Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West*, 4-5.

⁴ John Perlin, *A Forest Journey*: (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990, ; Hal Rothman, "The Indians, Deer, and Wolves Seem Here to Have Things Their Own Way: Settlement and Environment in McLean County, Illinois, 1820-1850," (unpublished paper, possession of the author).

provided the one genuine purpose for exploring the area; to link the heart of Texas with the nation's new western territories required roads or railbeds through as much as one thousand miles of open land, large areas of which remained under Comanche Indian control well into the 1870s. Explorers took great personal risk, even when they traveled with armed military escort, and such considerations for survival affected their thinking when they discussed any options they perceived.

The first American expedition across the area closely followed the signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In 1848, Maj. Robert S. Neighbors, the federal Indian agent in Texas who had served in the same office for the Republic of Texas, and Colonel John S. "Rip" Ford, a former physician and politician who became a Texas Ranger hero during the Mexican War, headed a semi-official expedition that sought a route to El Paso from central Texas. They paralleled the route of an early 1849 Topographical Engineers' survey from Central Texas to the El Paso region, which traveled west well south of the Guadalupe Mountains and just north of the Davis Mountains. Neighbors and Ford followed a more northerly route. They left Austin, followed the Upper Colorado River, and crossed over to Brady's Creek, a tributary of the San Saba River. From there they continued west along the Concho River to its mouth, cut across the Pecos River through Horsehead Crossing and went straight west to the Rio Grande at El Paso. On their return, they crossed through the Guadalupe Mountains to the Pecos and retraced the route back to Austin from there. The party discovered a possible railroad route to accompany the road they sought on the way back; the railroad route they found viable passed within miles of the limestone Carlsbad formation.⁵

The most surprising aspect about the Neighbors and Ford survey in the fiercely individualistic state of Texas was the cooperation it inspired between local, state, and federal authorities. Although no representative of the Corps of Topographical Engineers accompanied Neighbors and Ford, the information from the survey enjoyed wide currency, and at least in exploration, developed a spirit of cooperation that joined disparate entities more typically at odds. In effect, Texans looked at the information as the basis of a road route, while federal officials saw in the same reports the start of a southern transcontinental railroad, but neither found the situation objectionable. In 1850, with the ideology of Manifest Destiny and federal resources behind it, Lieutenant F.T. Bryan of the Corps of Topographical Engineers resurveyed both the Neighbors-Ford route and the more southerly one previously explored.⁶

The early surveys piqued greater curiosity about the ways to reach this new part of the United

⁵ Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West*, 229-31; T. R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* (NY: McMillan, 1968), 375-77; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 273; for an interesting look at the indirect consequences of the Neighbors expedition, see Thomas S. Edrington, "Military Influence on the Texas-New Mexico Boundary settlement," *New Mexico Historical Review*, 59 4 (October 1984), 371-94.

⁶ Max Meisel, *A Bibliography of American Natural History* (NY: The Premier Publishing Co., 1924-1929); Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803-1863*, 231-34; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 273; United States, *Reports of Explorations and Surveys, to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean* (Washington: A.O.P. Nicholson, Printer, 1855-1860).

States. Mexico's great failing in its northern lands had been a failure to establish reliable communication and transportation to and from its outposts. The Americans had no intention of repeating this dramatic Mexican shortcoming. They moved quickly to initiate and secure their own routes, rapidly binding the newly acquired territories more tightly to the American core than they had ever experienced with its Mexican predecessor. This process had a twofold effect: it illustrated the power of the Americans, while at the same time it inspired resentment in the people of New Mexico at the transformation of nationality, language, and power that followed the end of the Mexican War.

The first major military expedition through the Guadalupe Mountains and the trans-Pecos region solidified these contradictory sentiments as it mapped with more detail possible routes across the southern plains. Dispatched in 1849 by Colonel John James Abert, the head of the Corps of Topographical Engineers and a vaunted explorer in his own right, Captain Randolph Barnes Marcy headed a force comprising two companies of his Fifth Infantry regiment, one company of the First Dragoons, and Lieutenant James Hervey Simpson of the Topographical Engineers. Just beginning a distinguished career in exploration, Marcy sought a pathway for a transcontinental railroad as well as an overland migration route. In 1849, he began a journey that left Fort Smith, Arkansas, and followed the merchant Josiah Gregg's Canadian River Trail of 1839 into New Mexico. There the expedition turned toward Santa Fe. Simpson's command remained to explore areas to the west of the Rio Grande as Marcy headed back to Fort Smith. The return took him south from Santa Fe, along the Rio Grande to El Paso. Marcy then turned east, traversed the Guadalupe Mountains, and headed down the Pecos River on his way to Big Spring, a favorite stopping point for the Comanche, located in modern Texas. From there, the expedition continued east to Fort Washita on the Red River. The work of Marcy and Simpson confirmed the viability both of an overland road to El Paso and an accompanying rail route. Despite an encounter with the Kiowa Indians in which one of his men was killed and the continued presence of the Comanches, Marcy himself favored his return route through the Guadalupe and across the edge of the *llano* to Big Spring as the easiest southern way to El Paso as well as the best possible rail route to California.⁷

As Marcy surveyed the region, commissioners from the United States and Mexico debated the question of the new, post-Mexican War boundary between the two countries. Complicated by the Gold Rush in California and national political machinations, the effort proceeded slowly, but in 1850 work on the east end of boundary began in earnest. For this endeavor, a new boundary commissioner, John Russell Bartlett of Providence, Rhode Island, was selected. A bookstore owner with an armchair interest in exploration, Bartlett was a political appointee who lacked the skills and experience necessary for surveying. His most important qualification for the task had little to do with exploration; for years he had been a partner in a bookstore in the Astor Hotel in New York, frequented by such luminaries as an

⁷ Robert Royal Russel, *Improvements of Communication with the Pacific Coast as an Issue in American Politics, 1783-1864* (NY: Torch Press, 1948): 8-25; Edward Wallace, *The Great Reconnaissance: Soldiers, Artists, and Scientists on the Frontier, 1848-1862* (Boston: Little-Brown, 1955); Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803-1863*, 213-17; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 271-72.

aged Albert Gallatin, the Swiss-born American financier and statesman; John Lloyd Stephens, an attorney with a passion for antiquities who revealed the Maya to the modern world; Henry Schoolcraft, an early proto-ethnologist of Native Americans; and the journalist and proto-archaeologist Ephraim G. Squier. With Gallatin, Bartlett founded the American Ethnological Society, similar in its goals to the American Antiquarian Society. The bookshop in the Astor Hotel held a certain cachet among mid-nineteenth-century intellectuals. Edgar Allan Poe was even known to visit the shop, for the company was excellent and the opportunity for stimulating conversation and new ideas unmatched.⁸

Bartlett believed the knowledge this experience provided prepared him for the work of a boundary commissioner, but talking about ethnology and crossing 1,000 miles of desert were entirely different endeavors. Bartlett set out for Texas in spring 1850 with a large, well-equipped contingent that included a detachment of Topographical Engineers, a number of civilian surveyors, fifty mechanics, field scientists sponsored by various professional societies, personal friends and relatives, and a small navy to transport the troops. Numerous calamities befell the expedition from the moment it left New York Harbor. Murders occurred along the way; consistent episodes of drunkenness by officials as well as civilian teamsters almost destroyed the mission; at least one near-mutiny occurred; and insubordination became rife. On August 3, 1850, the main contingent left on the steamer *Galveston*; Bartlett and the accompanying dignitaries departed more than one week later on a different ship. Before they reached the Lone Star State, the men on the *Galveston* engaged in behavior any gentleman such as Bartlett would have scorned. Stopping at Key West, Lieutenant Isaac G. Strain, the naval officer who accompanied the expedition, led the men ashore with predictable results. When they returned to the ship, Strain felt compelled to have two men bound and locked in their cabins and a third thrown overboard. Only the intervention of the chief Topographical Engineer, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel John McClellan, saved the men from severe discipline. When the *Galveston* docked in New Orleans, tension grew. By the time the party started for San Antonio, little discipline remained. A little more than one month later, the party arrived in San Antonio. The trouble continued; a teamster killed a San Antonio resident and Bartlett paid the family a one-hundred dollar indemnity. One teamster murdered another and fled. The trouble continued on the way to El Paso. Bartlett left ahead of the main group by the Upper Road in an effort to reach El Paso to meet the Mexican commissioner on the appointed day. The main contingent followed, but soon one of McClellan's officers shot the wagon master, who subsequently died of his wounds. While a jury deliberated the officer's fate, the man committed suicide; soon after, the jury acquitted him on the grounds of self-defense. Strain, himself known for drunkenness, left the expedition to return to Washington, D.C., to file charges against McClellan. Bartlett concurred, asking McClellan to resign; The colonel responded by demanding a court martial and charging that Bartlett's brother, George, transported illegal goods with the expedition and then sold them to the military at exorbitant prices. McClellan also charged the quartermaster for the expedition with engaging

⁸ Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 271-72; C. W. Ceram, *The First American: A Story of the North American Archaeology* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), 201-03; C. W. Ceram, *Gods, Graves, and Scholars: The Story of Archaeology* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 337-53.

in the same activities. As a result, McClellan followed Strain, neither returning to the expedition.⁹

Bartlett clearly could not lead as diverse and contentious a group as the boundary survey expedition. His choices of compatriots for the trip, mostly friends, relatives, and hangers-on, initiated many of the problems. They often behaved frivolously, neither showing nor inspiring respect, and by example undermining the discipline that military officers sought to maintain among their troops. Bartlett's unwillingness to travel with the men and behave as their leader certainly created a vacuum that every officer on the expedition tried to fill. Nor was there any sense of purpose among the members of the expedition; Bartlett's own dilatory leadership style assured that. Combined with the difficult conditions of such work and an entirely ordinary contingent of soldiers and civilians, the situation showed all the traits of a disaster waiting to happen. Problems continued even after the expedition reached El Paso. Bartlett fired a number of teamsters, some of whom went on a drunken rampage and killed Edward Clarke, the son of Bartlett's political sponsor, U.S. Senator John Clarke of Rhode Island. Bartlett's commission dispensed military justice, hanging four of the men, but the expedition remained disorganized, unruly, demoralized, and inefficient.¹⁰

As Bartlett traversed west Texas on his way to El Paso to meet with the Mexican boundary commissioner, the region's topography tantalized his literary side. When Bartlett first approached the Guadalupe Mountains, he saw before him "the bold head" of "this most remarkable landmark, rising as it does far above all other objects, and terminating abruptly about three thousand feet above the surrounding plain." After almost 1,000 miles of desert and scrub land, the Guadalupe Mountains seemed majestic in comparison, of a piece with the Romantic spirit of the age and somehow divorced from the empiricism beginning to take shape in American science and literature. "No sunrise at sea or from a mountain's summit could equal the grandeur that which we now beheld," Bartlett admiringly wrote in his journal, "when the first rays struck the snow-clad mountain which reared its lofty head before us. The projecting cliffs of white and orange stood out in bold relief against the azure sky, while the crevices and gorges, filled with snow, showed their inequalities with a wonderful distinctness. At the same time the beams of sun playing on the snow produced the most brilliant and ever-changing iris hues. No painter's art could reproduce, or colors imitate, these gorgeous prismatic tints."¹¹ Bartlett's first view of the Guadalupe Mountains defined it for Americans. His colorful descriptions set the tone for the subsequent understanding of this great uplifted reef.

The new commissioner also managed to botch the political ramifications of the complicated negotiations with the Mexican boundary representative, General Pedro García Condé. Under orders to

⁹ Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803-1863*, 169-73; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 257-62.

¹⁰ Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803-1863*, 172-73; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 271.

¹¹ John Russell Bartlett, *Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, and Chihuahua* V 1 (NY: D. Appleton & Company, 1854), 117-18.

be conciliatory toward the Mexican government, Bartlett did not push the American advantage in any determined way. He noted the map used by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo commissioners was inaccurate, locating the Rio Grande two degrees of longitude west of its actual location and placing El Paso, the crucial point in the 1847 map, about thirty miles too far to the north of its actual location. Following this map left both the Mesilla Valley in southern New Mexico and the Santa Rita area in western New Mexico under Mexican control. Professional and personal disputes continued to flourish; A.B. Gray, the surveyor, refused to accept the longitude-latitude line to which Bartlett and Condé agreed, arguing instead for a measurement from the “town of Paso” as designated in the treaty instead of the inaccurate longitude and latitude measures that Bartlett accepted. Gray’s interpretation placed the U.S.-Mexico border farther to the south than the Bartlett-Condé line. In subsequent years, the question of the boundary line escalated into a major political dispute in the United States that placed expansionist southern Democrats on one side and the crumbling Whig party on the other. Only the signing of the Gadsden Treaty on December 30, 1853, resolved the problem. Under its terms, the United States agreed to purchase the disputed territory, a rectangular-shaped tract of more than 29,640 square miles in southern Arizona and New Mexico. Many regarded the Gadsden Purchase as a poorly disguised effort to keep the option of a southern transcontinental railway open.¹²

The question of the southern rail line melded closely into the dominant issue of the 1850s, the crisis over slavery that eventually redefined the nation as a union instead of a loosely affiliated collection of states. Beginning with the Missouri Compromise of 1820, slavery had been forbidden in territories north and west of the northern boundary of Missouri. This compromise salved the conscience of slavery opponents who could say they had begun to halt the expansion of the peculiar institution. At the same time it gave advocates room for hope; they added new territory into which to expand to maintain relative parity in congressional representation. The fragile arrangement held until the Mexican War, which brought a number of new territories into the nation. Nor could the fiction of parity in the admission of free and slave states be maintained after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Abolitionists who believed that the Missouri Compromise of 1820 doomed slavery to eventual death were horrified to assess the prospects for slavery in the new territories; from a southern perspective, the territories seemed rife for slavery. In 1846, U.S. Representative David Wilmot, a first-term congressman from Pennsylvania, added an amendment to appropriation legislation that barred slavery from any of the territories conquered from Mexico. The House passed the bill with the proviso attached, exacerbating tensions between North and South; the U.S. Senate failed to act on it. In the Senate, John C. Calhoun, the patriarch of southern politicians, crafted an eloquent constitutional defense of slavery as a property rights issue, but Wilmot’s effort energized the north and accelerated the polarization that dominated national politics.

It also created the context in which a southern political revival took place in the making of law

¹² Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803-1863*, 173-97; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 261-64.

and in its implementation in the courts. The Compromise of 1850, another in the long chain of political waffling designed to keep the issues concerning slavery from destroying the nation, made concessions to free-state ideology. It offered the settlers in any territory the right to decide if the resulting state would accept slavery or repudiate it, an idea called “popular sovereignty” that had gained considerable credence since it attracted national attention in 1847-48, as Lewis Cass, a possible presidential candidate, conceived the idea, and the Free Soil Party formed to support it. This encouraged southerners, for it meant that any territory west of the Mississippi River, not just those south of the northern boundary of Missouri, might be enticed into accepting slavery.

The Missouri Compromise effectively assured parallel admission of slave and free states, guaranteeing that well into the 1850s the South remained powerful in Congress. Southerners had a long history of national leadership. From George Washington and Thomas Jefferson to Andrew Jackson and John C. Calhoun, this region enjoyed effective spokesmen who wielded great power in the nation’s capital. When Manifest Destiny became the era’s dominant ideological current, southerners poised themselves to take advantage of the opportunity presented them. Jefferson Davis, President Franklin K. Pierce’s Secretary of War from 1853-1857 who later went on to the presidency of the Confederate States of America, played an instrumental role in assuring that southern routes for a transcontinental railroad were explored as thoroughly as northern options. From Davis’s prescient perspective, it was a rare opportunity to use technology to extend and enhance the paternalistic, cruel, and anachronistic system of cash-crop slavery that prevailed along the southern and southeastern coasts.

Davis’s astute maneuvering guaranteed that the Corps of Topographical Engineers surveys would include the exploration of both northern and southern routes. Among the primary purposes for most military exploration in the West was the location of a rail route to the Pacific Ocean. The topography to the south was flatter than to the north, making a southern route an easier engineering feat. The entire path, from the *llano* of west Texas to the coastal mountains outside San Diego, had to be carefully surveyed to assess its suitability. The siting of any route across the West spoke volumes about the nation’s future; a political rationale for such a decision clearly could not suffice in the polarized climate of the 1850s. Neither the Abolitionists nor southerners enjoyed a clear advantage. Northern businessmen also had a stake in the situation. A northern rail route offered them greater potential profits than a southern counterpart. In the face of what North or South perceived as economic injustice, either Abolitionists or southerners could disrupt the workings of the nation in their own section of the country. Whatever decision resulted required greater authority than politics could grant it; it had to be regarded as a nonpartisan and even moral decision. The stakes for Topographical Engineers and other explorers, regardless of their political views, were enormous.

Within this complicated national context, in 1854 another military officer, the erratic Brevet Captain John Pope of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, led a survey along the southern route. Pope had been the most unprofessional and least distinguished member of the Topographical Engineers. In 1838, he reported on a reconnaissance of Minnesota; a superior noted that Pope’s map was the same as that of Joseph N. Nicollet, a French scientist who immigrated to the United States, and sponsored by Pierre Chouteau of the American Fur Company, surveyed the upper Mississippi River in

1838. Pope also received a reprimand for his conduct on the Northeastern Boundary Survey. Senior officers, such as Lieutenant Colonel Joseph E. Johnston, declined the pleasure of Pope's company in their commands. Yet the captain had a flare; once he appeared in St. Louis after last being seen in Santa Fe, inaccurately claiming to have discovered a new Santa Fe Trail. Pope became something of a pariah within the Corps, but the prevailing view of him in the military seemed not to disturb him in the least.¹³

The grandiose and vain Pope served as a perfect foil for Jefferson Davis's strategy. The Secretary of War — a southerner who identified strongly with the culture of the South and the idea of state's rights and who felt the need to support the region's expansion but opposed secession — had to rely on the Corps of Topographical Engineers for survey work. Only two members of the corps, Pope and Davis's lifelong friend and West Point classmate, Major William H. Emory, came from slave-holding states. Subject to charges of political maneuvering in favor of the peculiar institution of slavery, Davis tried to seem impartial in his selection of officers. His 1853 and 1854 decisions appeared unbiased, but the choice of the unreliable Pope belied the question of impartiality. Any northern observer could assess Davis's choices and accuse the secretary of favoring a southern route not only as because of the regional affiliation of the officers who carried out his orders, but also by the omission of any survey in search of a more central railroad pass through the Rocky Mountains.¹⁴

Davis held power firmly and wielded it carefully; usually he succeeded with finesse. In the case of the Pope survey, Davis kept control by his choice of officer. In October 1853, the Secretary of War ordered Pope to survey a route that began at Doña Ana, New Mexico, and continued east across the *Llano Estacado* to Preston on the Red River. This route followed the Thirty-second Parallel, the southernmost alternative rail route considered by the federal government, and it clearly best suited the goals of the South. At the same time, Davis ignored the requests of northerners and expansionists for survey work on northern routes, and instead commissioned another survey east from San Diego to demonstrate the transcontinental viability of the southern route. Pope and a large party left Doña Ana early in February 1854 with two objectives: to find a pass through the Guadalupe Mountains and to explore the *llano*. Previous work made both objectives easily attainable. Marcy had the needs of a railroad in mind when he followed the Neighbors and Ford route along the Thirty-second Parallel, as did Lieutenant Nathaniel Michler of the Corps of Topographical Engineers in 1849 and 1850, when he followed part of Marcy's return path. Pope easily found a route through the Guadalupe Mountains, discovering several caves, attempted to sink wells near the Pecos River, and continued to the *llano*.¹⁵ In a fashion typical of his career, Pope never ventured far onto the unfamiliar *llano*, but enthusiastically

¹³ Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803-1863*, 69-73, 129, 246-47; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 274; Brevet Captain John Pope, *Report of Exploration for Route for the Pacific Railroad near the Thirty-Second Parallel of North Latitude from the Red River to the Rio Grande* (Washington, DC: 1854).

¹⁴ Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803-1863*, 277-79; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 291-92.

¹⁵ Pope, *Report of Exploration*.

attested to its suitability afterwards. He found the region desirable for a rail route, ticking off its numerous advantages; sinking artesian wells in the *llano* as a source of water ranked prominently among Pope's assertions. He even announced that a southern rail route could capture most of the trade in northern Mexico for the United States. Pope also described the voyage through the Guadalupe Mountains as an "easy passage," although in need of clearing and roadwork in some places; Bartlett opined differently in 1850 when he saw the narrow pass through the mountains, part of it "on a bare rocky shelf not wide enough for two wagons to pass." Pope put out the kind of effort Davis had every reason to expect and reported in the fallacious manner entirely consistent with his previous behavior. The Secretary of War added another weapon to his arsenal — a vain, disingenuous and easily manipulated officer.¹⁶

Sectional issues and the route of a transcontinental railroad remained intertwined until the secession of the southern states in 1861 dashed any chance of railroad construction along the Thirty-second Parallel. The question of exploration and national goals had become charged by the insistence on regional, state, and local prerogatives that ultimately brought the nation to civil war. Against this backdrop, the Guadalupe Mountains and the trans-Pecos region remained inconsequential. The great schemes of the moment and the textured complications of the 1850s all viewed the region as a path to somewhere else. Where Indians adapted their cultures to survive in the region, an entire generation of Euro-American visionaries and officers, explicating the dominant and interconnected ideas of their time — exploration and sectional crisis — thought little of the trans-Pecos area as they passed through it, seeing it only as avenue to other places and goals. As did most of their predecessors, surveyors left only their intentions in the Guadalupe Mountains and the trans-Pecos region and marks on a map to denote where they crossed.

During the contentious 1850s, the best way to preserve a free-state or slave-state advantage became to create on-the-ground realities in the disputed territories. With the doctrine of popular sovereignty determining the expansion of slavery even more comprehensively after the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 enshrined the idea of local choice, the concepts of Manifest Destiny and individual advantage from national expansion drew ever closer. Anglo-American settlement of the region, based on the expansionist doctrine of Manifest Destiny, the vast numbers of Americans and their growing economic power, and the technological systems of a nascent industrial society, followed the surveyors, initiating a range of changes that allowed for the development of communities in the region. Reverberations from the activities of the people who passed through the Guadalupe Mountains and the trans-Pecos region characterized this transformation process. Roads and trails first defined the area for Americans; emigrants to the California Gold Rush followed Marcy's return route as they headed west and a generation of migrants followed.

In the general headiness about expansion, civilian entrepreneurs also capitalized on the efforts of

¹⁶ Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West 1803-1863*, 233-37, 291-93; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 289-90; Pope, *Report of Exploration*, 7; Bartlett, *Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, and Chihuahua* V 1, 120-21.

federal explorers to provide services to the burgeoning nation. The Gold Rush that began in 1848 prompted a wave of settlement, and the United States became a nation with two widely separated coasts. The connections between both coasts remained tenuous; supplies, goods, mail, and people had to travel from the eastern United States around the Cape of Good Hope at South America's southern tip before they completed the long and arduous trip to San Francisco. If they were bold and foolhardy travelers could cross the fever-ridden Isthmus of Panama instead, risking fatal fever and other maladies in an effort to shorten the typically six-month trip around the Cape of Good Hope. The truly brave could attempt a cross-country ordeal, but this last choice was favored by migrants rather than commercial shippers. Anyone who made the trip from St. Louis across the plains and over the Sierra or Cascade mountains was likely to prefer another way to return. No matter what route anyone chose to California, the journey remained an ordeal until the 1870s.

After California's statehood, delivery of the U.S. mail by a system organized during the 1840s became a priority. Statehood meant an entire range of official mail had to reach the new state in a timely manner; the six-month voyage around South America assured that news and necessary documents were outdated long before they arrived in San Francisco or Sacramento. With everything from land claims, new legislation, court decisions and news about the sectional crisis essential to the development of legal, social, and economic practices in the new state, federal officials sought a better means to send important documents to the most distant part of the nation. One of the most certain ways to facilitate this goal was to let a contract for overland delivery of the U.S. mail.

A fifty-six-year-old eastern entrepreneur named John Butterfield responded to this offer with an ambitious plan to follow the route of the military surveys from Missouri to San Diego. Certain he would secure the bid, Butterfield built a network of people and secured almost unlimited financing before receiving the contract. He promised a chain of stations within the first year of operation, and with this pledge, on September 16, 1857 he won the federal contract for the semiweekly cross-continental mail delivery at the astronomical sum of \$600,000 per year for six years. *The New York Times* thundered at what it saw as squandering of the taxpayer's money, but President James Buchanan wired his congratulations to Butterfield, calling the contract a "glorious triumph for civilization." Buchanan understood the implications of the overland mail service as a means to facilitate the nation's growth.¹⁷

For Butterfield, acquiring the contract was the easiest of the many tasks he faced; building the route and all necessary facilities proved far more difficult. By 1858, crews had begun the construction of stations along the survey route, and the entrepreneur's planned Butterfield Overland Mail Trail took shape. From Tipton, Missouri, near St. Louis, to San Francisco — an almost 3,000-mile journey — Butterfield's stages were scheduled to make the trip in twenty-three days and twenty-three hours; an excellent run could reach the coast in a little more than twenty-two days. El Paso was the halfway point; one visitor remarked on being forty-three minutes behind the coach running the opposite direction at the

¹⁷ Robert N. Mullin, *Stagecoach Pioneers of the Southwest* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1983) Southwestern Studies Monograph No. 71, 31-33.

one-square-block Butterfield station in Franklin, near El Paso. With speed at a premium, the arduous trips taxed the spirits of drivers, animals, and the occasional passengers.¹⁸

Visitors did not find the options for food, sleeping, or other accommodations much to their liking. Meals cost a dollar, but all that anyone typically received for that sum was pork, crackers, and coffee without milk or sugar. “Breakfast was served on the bottom of a candle box,” one visitor noted, “and such as sat down were perched on inverted pails or nature’s chair.” Tin cups held the coffee they drank. Breakfasts consisting of, in the words of one traveler, “coffee, tough beef, and butterless shortcake,” were typical.¹⁹ Sleeping accommodations were as bad and facilities for washing simply did not exist. These intrepid passengers could make the trip, but the experience would rarely be described as pleasant.

The Butterfield Overland Stage was a fragile operation from its inception, entirely dependant on a seemingly never-ending line of stations. Spaced no more than 113 miles apart anywhere in the country — the longest distance being that between the Pecos River and the first stop to its west — stations held supplies and replacement men and animals. More than 250 leather-braced swaying coaches, called “celerity wagons” by their makers and ordered especially for the Butterfield company; traveled the route. These coaches had smaller wheels for a lower center of gravity so they would be less likely to overturn on rugged western roads and trails. Canvas replaced wood on the tops and sides to reduce the weight of the Butterfield coaches. More than 800 workers — stagecoach drivers to cooks — tended the line. Passengers paid the exorbitant fare of two hundred dollars going westward; because the mass of passengers were headed in that direction, travelers paid less coming back east. The fare equaled nearly the annual salary of a schoolteacher. Most travelers found the journey excruciating. In 1858, newspaperman Waterman L. Ormsby II of the *New York Herald*, who regarded the opening of Butterfield’s mail route as one of the greatest events of the age, found the *Llano Estacado*, the staked plains, the most grueling portion of the trip. “As far as the eye could see,” he wrote, “there were decayed and decaying bones of animals and sometimes men.” Nor did the Guadalupe Mountains impress Ormsby. “Guadalupe Peak loomed up before us all day in the most aggravating manner,” the journalist noted. “It fairly seemed to be further off the more we traveled, so that I almost gave up in despair of hopes of reaching it.” Ormsby’s sentiment echoed that of John Russell Bartlett nearly a decade before. Bartlett and his party “expected to reach it within a couple of hours of leaving camp,” the commissioner wrote in 1850. “But hour after hour, we drove directly towards it without seeming to approach nearer; and finally after journeying ten hours, the mountain seemed to be as distant as it was in the morning.” Fortunately for Butterfield, the mountain’s curious visual qualities posed little problem for his stage line. Passengers were an afterthought for the Butterfield Overland Mail; the primary objective

¹⁸ Robert Hine, *The American West: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 140-41; Mullin, *Stagecoach Pioneers of the Southwest*, 32.

¹⁹ Mullin, *Stagecoach Pioneers of the Southwest*, 35; quotes from Walter Lang, ed., *The First Overland Mail, Butterfield Trail, St. Louis to San Francisco, 1858-1861* (East Aurora, NY: no publisher, 1940).

was to carry the mail.²⁰

The Overland Stage Company built a series of stations from east to west in the trans-Pecos following the southern route along the Thirty-second Parallel after reaching the Pecos River at Horsehead Crossing to southeast of the Guadalupe Mountains. The first of these, 113 miles to the west and called Pope's Crossing after the obstreperous officer, was located almost exactly on the modern Texas-New Mexico border at the Pecos River. Farther west were the Delaware Springs and Independence Springs stops. The stagecoaches then began the difficult climb up the escarpment that led to the Guadalupe Mountains. At the base of El Capitan, along the route surveyed first by Neighbors and Ford and then by Marcy, the company established a "home station," a small stop where coaches changed drivers and passengers could lay over, at the Pinery in Pine Spring Canyon.²¹

The Pinery station was typical of these intermediate stops on the stage line. They were designed to allow the stage to replace tired horse or mule teams with fresh animals; at the more important of these stops, veterinarians, wheelwrights, and blacksmiths were sometimes stationed. When the route was threatened by Indian people who resented its passage through their land, armed guards deployed to the stations. The siting of such stations stemmed from utilitarian objectives. Water, especially in the dry Southwest, timber, and pasture determined location. The Pinery station offered a characteristic example of a stop; it sat adjacent to an acequia, an irrigation canal, from nearby Pine Spring, and a rock-walled corral for stock surrounded it. The Pinery featured a fifty-seven-foot long by forty-one wide stone fort with walls that reached eleven feet in height, the fourth of ten such structures that the company built west of the head of the Concho River in Texas. The meadows around it provided forage for stock. Three rooms, a blacksmith's shop, and a water tank graced the interior of the fort, assuring that the people there had a place to sleep, the necessary facilities for essential repairs and water. When Ormsby arrived on September 28, 1858, only the corral had been constructed; station master Henry Ramstein and his crew lived in tents. By November, the station was completed. While it was not a place of plenty, people who stopped there could survive. Ormsby received only venison pie and baked beans to eat when he arrived, but as the station became established, a wider variety of food became available. For between forty cents and a dollar, shortcakes, antelope, biscuits, "jerked" beef, and coffee were available. The nearby mountains abounded with game, and the people who stayed there made some small efforts at agriculture. Generally, the station depended almost exclusively on the passing stagecoaches for news, supplies, and other necessities for the survival. The only other consistent Anglo-American presence in the region remained the military, which like the Mescalero peoples, often came to utilize the springs in the limestone formations at the base of the mountains, graze their animals in its vicinity, and hunt the

²⁰ Lyle H. Wright and Josephine M. Bynum, eds., L. Waterman Ormsby, *The Butterfield Overland Mail* (San Marino, CA: The Henry Huntington Library, 1954); Mrs. Charles Gregory, "Old Tales Told by Intrepid Writer," *El Paso Times* September 27, 1958, 11; Mullin, *Stagecoach Pioneers of the Southwest*, 33; Bartlett, *Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, and Chihuahua* V 1, 118.

²¹ Mullin, *Stagecoach Pioneers of the Southwest*, 37.

natural life that depended on these sources of water in an otherwise arid part of the world.²²

The Pinery Station was a short-lived affair. Despite plotting a route that went west from the Pinery to stations at Crow Springs, Cornudas Tanks, Alamo Springs, and the ever-essential Hueco Tanks, a source of water that drew all kinds of people, within a year of the opening of the Pinery the company decided to use a different route across the trans-Pecos region. The distance between sources of water — especially west of the Pinery, where more than 100 miles of barren land, in places replete with salt or gypsum and rarely showing any evidence of water, made the trek difficult under the best of conditions — prompted the decision. The altitude of the Pinery also contributed to the decision; tired animals near the end of a more than fifty-mile trek became exhausted during the 2,000-foot climb to the Pinery. With the U.S. Postmaster General's approval, the company replaced the route with one that went south from Horsehead Crossing along a more southerly route guarded by Fort Stockton and Fort Davis soldiers.²³

Although the Butterfield company ceased to use the Pinery Station, it remained a useful stopover in the vicinity of the Guadalupe Mountains. Soldiers continued to use the station as a rest stop, and nearby dugout shelter houses that served as accommodations testified to this continued role. Others used the site — travelers through the region, squatters, freighters and drovers, and occasional renegades escaping pursuers; all stayed there intermittently.²⁴

The Butterfield Overland Mail fared only marginally better than its Pinery Station. The Thirty-second Parallel route was a southern concoction, a product of the nimble Jefferson Davis's political maneuvering. When Isaac Stevens, Washington Territory governor, promoted a far northern railway across the upper tier of American states and territories that appeared foolhardy in comparison with the already viable southern route, Davis seemed a certain victor. After Abraham Lincoln won the presidency in 1860 and South Carolina led the southern states into secession, all that maneuvering, and all the dreams based on it, collapsed. The possible southern rail route passed through what would become the Confederacy, and ceased to be viable as a way to transport freight. Nor did northern politicians care to accommodate southern desires in the aftermath of secession. The clouding secession question compromised Butterfield's position, and a combination of financial setbacks and a power play by rivals removed him from the presidency of the company he founded in 1859. He resigned rather than sit on the board of directors of the company he founded, and in 1860, experienced a physical breakdown followed by a devastating stroke. Subsequent company leadership was neither as supple nor as determined as the founder, and the firm's prospects faded. A central route to the California,

²² Roscoe P. Conkling and Margaret B. Conkling, *The Butterfield Overland Mail, 1857-1869* V 1 (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1947), 390-92; Dava McGahee Davy, "The Pinery Station," (Carlsbad, New Mexico: Carlsbad Caverns Natural History Association, no date), 1.

²³ Mullin, *Stagecoach Pioneers of the Southwest*, 41; Hine, *The American West*, 140.

²⁴ Conkling and Conkling, *The Butterfield Overland Mail, 1857-1869*, 1 393.

already organized by another freighting company — Russell, Majors, and Waddell, and a faster mail service called the Pony Express became the focuses of cross-country shipping. A move by Butterfield's successor to establish a parallel central route did little to elevate the company's fortunes. During the Civil War, the Butterfield operation transferred to the central route, where it made arrangements with the American Express Company and the United States Express Company, both of which initially operated as subcontractors to the Central Overland Mail Company, as the Butterfield operation was renamed. The Central Overland Mail Company found itself in financial difficulty in 1862, and its contract was transferred to Ben Holladay. After the war, the Wells Fargo Express Company took over the operation and became a success.²⁵

Within a very few years of the first runs on the Butterfield line, other Anglos came to the trans-Pecos area, where they developed economic endeavors. Of these, the cattle industry became most significant, creating not only an economy but a mythology in the immediate post-Civil War era that indelibly stamped an imprint on American society. Both the mythos and the cows that supported the cattle industry emanated from Texas, from which cattle had been driven to market before the Civil War. New Orleans and Memphis were typical destinations; Sedalia, Missouri, became the terminus of a major cattle drive during the Civil War. After the war, as the railroads slowly made their way west, Kansas towns such as Abilene, Newton, Wichita, and Dodge City made their names as the places where railroad track met the cattle trails, where the lean beef that came from west Texas met the conveyance that would bring it to dinner tables of industrial America. Texas offered a logical location to increase a herd. Typically mild winters made the region an outstanding place to breed cattle, with mothers delivering as many as twelve calves in a lifetime; the dry climate and sparse flora worked against Texas as a pasture. Forage became increasingly scarce as more and more animals grazed the same open western landscapes — the ones with the best grass that were closest to water.²⁶

As the Texas plains, the *llano*, became first crowded and then packed with cattle, the most savvy and seasoned of the cattlemen anticipated the problems and sought other pastures. Among them were cattle entrepreneurs Charles Goodnight and his friend, Oliver Loving, easily the most experienced cattlemen in Texas. They drove cattle as far as Chicago before the war, took a one-thousand head herd to the goldfields outside Denver in 1860, and after the Civil War broke out, retained their allegiance to Texas by supplying the Confederacy with beef throughout the conflict. After the Civil War, the two took their herds west and north, away from the Indian territory (present-day Oklahoma) and railheads in Kansas, toward Colorado and eventually Wyoming and Montana. During the summer season, the grasses in the north grew tall and cattle feasted. Following the Butterfield trail through Texas to the Pecos River, the Goodnight-Loving herds turned north and followed the water into New Mexico and to Fort Sumner, constructed in 1862 in the southeastern part of the state. Initially the pair then took their

²⁵ Mullin, *Stagecoach Pioneers of the Southwest*, 42; Hide, *The American West*, 141.

²⁶ Frederick Merk, *History of the Westward Movement* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 457-61; Mari Sandoz, *The Cattlemen: From the Rio Grande Across the Far Marias* (NY: Hastings House, 1958), 85-95.

cattle around the Raton Mountains and up the plains at the base of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains to the mining boomtown of Denver. There, in the fast-growing city, Loving sold this first herd to John W. Iliff, who supplied the Union Pacific Railroad construction crews with beef as he built a massive ranch in northeastern Colorado. Goodnight returned to Texas and brought another 1,200 head. When he made winter camp about forty miles from Fort Sumner, Loving joined him and the two began to sell cattle to government contractors at the fort and in Santa Fe, New Mexico. During the following years they went farther north, along the Bozeman Trail into Wyoming and Montana. Loving died at Fort Sumner as a result of a battle with Comanches along the Pecos River in 1867, but the following year, Iliff purchased \$40,000 worth of cattle from Goodnight at a ranch the Texan founded in Colorado. Goodnight and his partner pioneered a new cattle route, one that avoided the tensions between cattle drovers and Indians in the Indian Territory and the drovers and farmers in Kansas and brought beef to the transport cars of the Union Pacific that took the cattle to Chicago for slaughter.²⁷

The Goodnight-Loving Trail, as most knew this developing route to the north, became one of the most famous of the cattle trails. The trail followed the eastern rim of the trans-Pecos region. During the late 1860s and 1870s, the wide paths of marks left by cattle hooves became a common sight throughout much of the area as the animals headed north. Again, the dominant currents of the time passed by the Guadalupe Mountains and trans-Pecos region, resulting in no permanent settlement to add to the few who already lived along the Pecos. The area offered too little to people who sought home and profit elsewhere, who looked across the Pecos River and saw wasteland. Their interests left only millions of hoofprints along the trail, only the empty and sometimes fouled water holes from which the cattle drank and the torn flora and absent fauna that denoted the passage of large herds of animals not native to the area.

Loving's death at the hands of the Comanches highlighted another of the situations that endangered cattlemen, cross-country travelers, and the few settlers alike. East of El Paso remained Mescalero Apache country into the 1850s, while Comanches dominated the *llano* and large areas of central Texas. Settlers left the core areas of Texas at their own risk well into the 1860s; Comanches were so powerful and dominant that the advance of the Anglo-Americans into west Texas cost, in an unusual kind of tabulation, an average of seventeen Anglo-American lives per mile, a total that worked out to more than 200 people per year who were killed or captured by Comanches over a thirty-five-year period. Texas author laureate John Graves characterized the meeting between Comanches and Texans as a situation in which "each breed found the other rough, acquisitive, and treacherous," and nothing in their mutual experience altered the opinion of either. Others have regarded the Comanche-Texan conflict as reflecting opposite sides of a similar cultural attitude. Both were proud, arrogant, vain, and persuaded they were moral and correct as they tried to eliminate the other. Only one had the American Army on its side.²⁸

²⁷ Merk, *History of the Westward Movement*, 457-61; Sandoz, *The Cattlemen*, 95-99; David Dary, *Cowboy Culture: A Saga of Five Centuries* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 122-26.

²⁸ John Graves, *Goodbye to a River* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 49-50; Fehrenbach, *Lone Star*, 529-30.

The westward expansion of Texans required protection, and the U.S. Army entered the region to play its typically prominent role in such endeavors. The surveys of the early 1850s noted the conditions in the region; directly or indirectly, all pointed out the need to address the question of the Comanches, and in the trans-Pecos, the Mescaleros. Both Indian peoples regarded the contested areas as their homeland and resented the intrusion of Anglo-American soldiers, settlers, and travelers. Accustomed to the mobile life of hunters and gatherers, experienced at raiding sedentary peoples of any race, the Mescaleros and the Comanches held their ground. In the construction of the world of Manifest Destiny, and in the terms of nineteenth-century Anglo-America, both stood in the way of “progress” and “civilization.”

By the early 1860s, the impact of an American presence became obvious in the trans-Pecos. It initiated a process that changed the existing balance of power in a way that Mescaleros and other southern plains and mountain peoples, accustomed to dealing with the Spanish and Mexicans, did not anticipate. American commerce traversed the region, leaving a few people in the region who possessed specific goals that related to the larger national economy. Americans shaped the vectors of a different future, one in which Mescaleros and other Indian peoples played a diminishing role and American settlers, still largely missing from the scene at the end of the 1850s, grew in importance. The catalyst of that transformation was the U.S. Army, directed from Washington, D.C., and unlike its Mexican and Spanish predecessors, capable of executing the orders given it. The Army was assigned several basic missions. First came securing the passage of Americans through the area, a goal intermittently achieved by the beginning of the Civil War. Following that objective, the military was supposed to prevent Indian raiding into Mexico, and finally, clear away Indian peoples in the region, both to terminate the incessant raiding that continued unabated and to make way for settlement. At the time, few considered the region as any great prize. Its resources seemed too sparse, its climate too hot and dry for most preindustrial Americans.

By the early 1860s, the Americans could claim more than a decade of experience in this border region, but still had little to show for it. While the stagecoaches went through and El Paso and other communities along the Rio Grande benefitted from the American ascension to power, the control the United States could establish was only as wide as the wagon tracks across the *llano* and through the mountains that its soldiers could defend; many times dominance was even more narrow. Despite Manifest Destiny, despite an ethos of conquest by settlement, initial American vectors in the region mirrored those of previous inhabitants. Even these newest conquerors passed through, following the easiest routes to the places they deemed more hospitable — those with water for crops and deep grasses for grazing. These sojourners had little initial impact on the region, adding little but expansion or widening of existing trails and a few forlorn and often withering homesteads and forts. Americans generally followed older trails and water courses in the trans-Pecos, a testament to the harsh and forbidding character of the region and the difficulty of securing it without the direct connections of railroads to the core of industrial America. Without trains, the American advantage, usually so pronounced in the post-Civil War West, was muted.

The appearance of the Americans and the surveys they initiated accomplished other tasks. They

made the nation conscious of the trans-Pecos region, as much for its qualities as a conquered place as for any mineral, agricultural, or ranching attributes it might have. Manifest Destiny and a need for cross-continental links explained American interest in the trans-Pecos region, and the surveys marked an American zone along the Rio Grande and out onto the *Llano Estacado* of west Texas. Establishing on-the-ground control of this region became a complicated endeavor that encompassed the better part of the twenty years that followed the beginning of the Civil War.

